



**FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA:
POLITICAL PARTY BUILDING AND ELECTION PREPARATION
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00
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I. SUMMARY

From August 1997 to June 1998, with funding under the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) sought to promote the development of multiparty systems and to foster public awareness of the principles and practices of democratic elections in Serbia and Montenegro.

In Serbia, the NDI program focused on building democratic political parties and on the development of a nonpartisan civic organization, the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID), whose primary mandate is election observation. The program's initial focus on strengthening the *Zajedno* coalition of democratic opposition parties following pro-democracy protests in Belgrade in the winter of 1997 was revised following *Zajedno's* dissolution at the republic level and the boycott by two of its constituent parties—along with other political parties-- of parliamentary and presidential elections in the fall of 1997. NDI assisted CeSID in its attempt to monitor those elections. In 1998, with democratic forces disunited and in disarray at the republic level, the Institute shifted its political party building focus to develop individual party capacity and coalition building among party branches in cities run by Serbia's democratic opposition.

NDI supported the nascent democratic reform process in Montenegro in several ways. NDI election law experts offered commentary on the republic's draft parliamentary and municipal election law, in coordination with similar efforts by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and trained political parties on preparations for that republic's first-ever democratic parliamentary elections in May 1998. In preparation for those elections, CeSID, with NDI assistance, coordinated and implemented an election observation effort with a Montenegrin election monitoring organization, the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CeDEM).

Despite considerable logistical challenges thrown in its way by Serbian authorities, NDI managed to establish itself in Serbia and Montenegro, train hundreds of partisan and nonpartisan political activists in rudimentary political organizing, and laid the groundwork for what has become a long-term democratization effort in both republics.

II. BACKGROUND

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which is comprised of the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro, is the self-proclaimed successor to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia following the break-up of the latter in the early 1990s. While the FRY possesses a constitution, a functioning state structure, and the framework for a multiparty democracy, it is, *de facto*, an authoritarian state run by former Serbian President and now Federal President Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic controls all apparatuses of the Federal and Serbian governments, state-owned media, the judiciary, and the state-owned economy. Political opposition and freedom of expression exist, but are not tantamount to a genuine multipartisan political system, nor do they approximate political freedom. The authoritarian control of the Milosevic regime was typified by the government's fraudulent invalidation of opposition victories in the 1996 local elections. The opposition coalition *Zajedno* reacted by staging, in coordination with independent student and labor groups, three months of daily, pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the winter into 1997 that brought hundreds of thousands of citizens into the streets.

Milosevic eventually conceded opposition victories in Serbia's leading cities, including Belgrade. Eventually, however, *Zajedno's* tremendous political capital was squandered as leadership instability, coalition infighting, a lack of a coherent program, and rumored political dealmaking between Milosevic and the strongest *Zajedno* leader, Vuk Draskovic, president of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO).

The Milosevic government announced presidential and parliamentary elections in July 1997 for later in the fall, effectively limiting the opposition's ability to mobilize and mount effective campaigns. *Zajedno's* dissolution at the republic level soon followed, with the decision of Vuk Draskovic to contest the elections, stifling any hope for a united opposition. Twelve opposition parties, led by the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS), Democratic Party (DS) and Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), declared an election boycott, but mounted separate boycott campaigns. The pre-election period was characterized by zealous government control over state election organizations and preparations, its unilateral and heavily politicized revision of the election law, and strict control over state media and harassment of independent media. State-controlled media alone covers the entire republic. The OSCE was invited by a reluctant government to observe the electoral process, and concluded that the elections fell far short of internationally accepted democratic standards.

The elections' results led to a protracted political crisis, in which the main players--Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Vojislav Seselj's Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and the SPO—cared more for political spoils than for the political system's lack of

democratic legitimacy. The SPS won 110 seats, the SRS won 82, and the SPO increased its number to 45-- evidence of Milosevic's poor showing relative to past victories and the increasing popularity of the populist and ultra-nationalist Radicals. Ultimately, a new government was formed led by the SPS, with the SRS and the Yugoslav United Left (JUL), an unreconstructed communist party created to institutionalize the substantial political power of Milosevic's wife, Mirjana Markovic, as coalition partners.

Voters registered their disgust with the Milosevic regime and their disappointment in *Zajedno* in October's presidential elections by voting in large numbers for Seselj. The election was invalidated due to the government's claim of insufficient turn out (i.e. less than 50 percent as mandated by the Serbian constitution). The government's claim was impossible to confirm independently. Many observers accused Milosevic of falsifying the turnout figure in order to deny Seselj the presidency. The polls were repeated in December and a Milosevic ally, Milan Milutinovic, secured a victory against the SRS leader. On this occasion, the government claimed that turnout exceeded 50 percent, an assertion disputed by CeSID and other independent observers who, denied credentials by the government to monitor inside polling stations, used exit counts to approximate turnout rates.

With this election round, the Milosevic government likely reverted to fraudulent means to cement its power. The democratic opposition was disunited, out of parliament, and the target of embittered political sentiment among citizens who believed that the opportunity for democratic change had been adroitly overturned by Milosevic with the unwitting assistance of a hopelessly inept opposition.

Also in 1997, Montenegro distanced itself from Serbia's pariah status by seeking to rejoin the international community unilaterally. Due in large part to the support of Montenegro's opposition parties, erstwhile Milosevic ally Milo Djukanovic won the presidential run-off elections in October 1997, narrowly defeating incumbent Momir Bulatovic, a stalwart Milosevic ally. Undergirding Montenegro's reform process was Djukanovic's public support for freedom of the press and new laws on media, elections, and party financing. The victory of President Milo Djukanovic and his For a Better Life coalition in the 1998 Montenegrin parliamentary elections marked a promising upturn for that republic's democratization process, and signaled the beginning of a political war of attrition with the Serbian and Federal Yugoslav government.

Based on its initial FRY assessment in March 1997, NDI concluded that the Milosevic regime's antipathy toward democratic reform meant that democratization in Serbia would fall to democratic opposition parties, which must develop the organizational and communication skills to present a credible democratic alternative to citizens. At the same time, voters would have to invest themselves in the country's political and election system. To promote these two

goals, NDI's Serbia program focused on political party development and the development of a nonpartisan voice for democratic change.

In training local political party branches NDI and the International Republican Institute agreed to a geographical split, in which IRI worked with parties in Vojvodina while NDI conducted training seminars in central and southern Serbia, excluding Kosovo. From its office in Belgrade, NDI provided election training to reform-oriented political parties in Montenegro and assisted in OSCE and domestic election monitoring efforts.

The program was adversely affected by the Institute's inability to secure visas required for both in-country representatives and NDI staff working in the FRY on short-term assignments. This situation restricted NDI activities by requiring the Institute's resident representative to devote considerable time to visa extensions, denying the program the benefit of outside expertise and compelling the resident representative to depart Serbia for eight weeks in the spring of 1998 to secure a new visa outside of the country.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The program's objective was to promote greater participation in the political process by supporting political parties and civic groups.

NDI's specific objectives for the political party building programs were to help parties to:

- Realize election programs that are well-organized and address the key concerns and interests of voters
- Formulate action plans that contain activities resulting in stronger organizations, improved communication, and constituency servicing

In regards to supporting domestic nonpartisan election monitoring groups, NDI sought to contribute to the transparency and public knowledge of the electoral process.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Serbia Political Party Building

In August 1997, NDI began the USAID-funded program to assist political parties in advance of presidential and parliamentary elections to be held that fall. NDI distributed baseline questionnaires began training with political parties.

Because of the undemocratic and uncertain political conditions prevailing during the election cycle, NDI conducted a brief, staff-based program assessment in October 1997 to confirm the need for long-term party development assistance. The delegation conducted meetings in Belgrade and Kragujevac, and met with political party leaders, NGOs and the media, as well as representatives of international governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including USAID and the U.S. embassy/Belgrade.

The assessment team reaffirmed that democratically oriented political parties would be key to Serbia's democratization process and, if not able to secure positive change in the immediate term, would necessarily spearhead political change in the coming years. Based on the team's findings, NDI concluded that Serbia's opposition parties could benefit from the Institute's assistance, and that it should work primarily, but not exclusively with the Civic Alliance of Serbia, Democratic Party and Serbian Renewal Movement, on basic party operations, including platform development, membership recruitment, fundraising, voter contact, and internal party communications. NDI further concluded that, given the opposition's disarray at the republic level, it should concentrate its efforts locally, where considerable political talent lay untapped and where the democratic opposition, in power in many cities, was struggling to provide for constituents in the face of political subterfuge by the Milosevic regime.

NDI conducted initial training/consultation seminars with branch party leadership and activists representing the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS), the Democratic Party (DS), the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) New Democracy (ND); Social Democracy (SD); and Democratic Center (DC).

These consultations, coupled with a party baseline questionnaire in January 1998, enabled NDI to design a series of formal training. In March, four NDI political party trainers held single party training seminars in Belgrade and multiparty seminars in six other cities in central and southern Serbia. The training focused on message development; voter targeting; door-to-door canvassing, survey, leaflet and newsletter development and distribution; membership development; fundraising; and strategic planning.

In Belgrade, NDI held single party sessions with Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS), the Democratic Party (DS) the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) and New Democracy (ND). NDI's single party seminars allowed the Institute to customize its training to individual party needs. For logistical reasons, NDI trained the Social Democracy (SD) and Democratic Center (DC) jointly. On the basis of training, NDI developed a plan that covered the Belgrade region and central and southern Serbia. Accordingly, NDI worked in Belgrade; Kragujevac; Kraljevo; Nis; Valjevo; Vranje; and Uzice. NDI focused its work on GSS, DS, and SPO, and on DC, SD and ND on an ad hoc basis.

Due to administrative hurdles posed in acquiring visa accreditation, NDI's Resident Representative relocated outside of Serbia for two months in Spring 1998. Following his return to Belgrade in mid-May, NDI traveled to four cities (Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Uzice and Valjevo) in central Serbia in mid-June to conduct a series of workshops and meetings with branches of the DS, GSS and SPO. After the multiparty March training, NDI had invited a number of branches to establish working groups of six to 10 activists that could work with NDI over a period of three to six months. For the branches that had set up such groups, NDI led workshops on voter research entitled "Know Your Voters, Know Yourself." Through the training series NDI aimed to establish a bilateral working relationship with NDI and train participants in the art of survey canvassing. In addition to the workshops, NDI offered branches that had not yet created working groups the opportunity to join the program. Branches were required to complete a series of tasks reviewed in training before they could proceed to the next training round.

Training sessions were conducted with the following party branches:

DS Valjevo
DS Kraljevo
DS Kragujevac
DS Vracar (Belgrade)
GSS Uzice
GSS Kraljevo
GSS Kragujevac
SPO Valjevo

Montenegro Political Party Building

Prior to the October 1997 presidential election in Montenegro, NDI conducted meetings with political leaders, journalists and NGO representatives to acquaint itself further with the political landscape. NDI had included a visit to Podgorica as part of its initial FRY assessment in March 1997. Through the October meetings, and during a more formal assessment exercise conducted in November 1997 by NDI staff, the Institute was able to establish relations with political leaders, and move forward in its understanding of the reform process launched by then presidential aspirant and Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic. The NDI assessment team concluded that the political reform process was deserving of assistance, and laid plans to conduct a Montenegro program based in Podgorica rather than from Belgrade.

In February 1998, Serbia Resident Representative Paul Rowland (Canada), NDI political party expert Sue Tupper (U.S.), NDI Croatia Resident Representative Karen Gainer (Canada), and political organizer Jim Kirk (U.S.) conducted individual training seminars with seven political parties: the Democratic League of Albanians; Democratic Party of Socialists;

the Democratic Union of Albanians; the Liberal Alliance of Montenegro; the Party of Democratic Action; the People's Party; and the Social Democratic Party. The training seminars took place in Podgorica and Ulcinj.

With an eye to May's parliamentary elections, NDI focused on message development; voter targeting; campaign plans; and door-to-door canvassing. With the advent of the pre-election campaign, the parties were able to apply the techniques presented in the training immediately. For example, after a discussion on message development, participants were asked to recite their party's message. They subsequently restated their party messages according to NDI's presentation. Role-play exercises also presented an opportunity for NDI's trainers to assess the parties' understanding of the material, and determine where parties needed additional training.

Serbia Domestic Nonpartisan Election Monitoring

Public confidence is a key ingredient in building the integrity of any election process. Without public confidence in the political, legal, and administrative components of election preparations and in the voting on election day, the 1997 presidential and parliamentary elections were unlikely to contribute to democratization— whatever the outcome. With elections called in late July and the declaration of an election boycott by the opposition, NDI decided to focus its election efforts on its work with CeSID.

Begun by student leaders active in the 1996-97 pro-democracy protests, CeSID expressed interest in election monitoring and in becoming a nonpartisan advocate for democratic reform. Prior to the September 1997 parliamentary elections, NDI provided technical, logistical and material support to CeSID. In the pre-election period, the group's efforts focused largely on promoting election monitoring, attracting volunteers, securing credentials and publicizing their efforts.

To promote its efforts and attract volunteers, CeSID worked cooperatively with independent labor activists and pensioners throughout Serbia. NDI sponsored numerous training seminars for CeSID activists and volunteers, and brought an international group of election monitoring experts to Serbia to assist its representative and conduct training sessions. In August 1997, Marianna Drenska of the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR) traveled to Belgrade to conduct a training on organizing an election monitoring effort, including the recruitment, training, and deployment of election day monitors nationwide. NDI brought Michael Marshall (U.S.), a former NDI resident representative with extensive experience in election monitoring, to Belgrade to work with

CeSID on political and organizing issues. Based on its work with NDI, CeSID conducted training sessions outside of Belgrade, and focused on how volunteers should monitor with or without credentials.

In September 1997, after being denied credentials by the Republic Electoral Commission and despite intimidation in the pre-election period and at the polls, CeSID's volunteers monitored the parliamentary elections. The Center successfully fielded 400 volunteers, who monitored approximately 200 sites, and distributed complaint forms to voters.

Prior to the second round of the October 1997 presidential elections, CeSID held several press conferences, attended by domestic and international journalists, to inform and educate the public and international community about electoral and political conditions and the Center's activities, including media monitoring and election day observation. On election day, CeSID mobilized approximately 950 volunteers who, despite having been again refused credentials by the government, monitored outside of polling stations to determine whether or not turnout met the required 50 percent threshold. The elections were subsequently invalidated due to insufficient turnout, as noted by CeSID and later confirmed by the government.

In November 1997, the Center released its report, *Eyes on the Elections*, a comprehensive analysis of the fall's presidential and parliamentary elections. Using international law as a reference, the report examined Serbian electoral and political conditions. The report provided information about the elections and serves to raise public understanding of the electoral process. Specifically, CeSID's report addresses flaws in Serbia's election law; state television's biased coverage in favor of the ruling coalition; administrative problems associated with the voter registration lists; an opaque vote counting procedure; and the government's refusal of accreditation to nonpartisan election monitors.

In December 1997, despite again being refused credentials by the government (which had earlier indicated to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe that CeSID would be granted credentials) CeSID monitored both rounds of Serbia's second presidential elections. Fielding more than 900 volunteers, the Center again focused on determining whether or not turnout met the required threshold of 50 percent. In March 1998, CeSID released *Eyes on the Elections 2*, a comprehensive report on election-day activities and media coverage of Serbia's December presidential elections. To publicize the report and raise public consciousness, the Center held public discussions throughout Serbia. The Center's public relations and educational activities helped established it as a public watchdog and a respected source of information.

Montenegro Domestic Election Monitoring

Prior to October's presidential elections, NDI's Resident Representative traveled to Podgorica to evaluate the political situation and the possibility that CeSID, which is registered as under Federal Yugoslav law, might participate in an election monitoring effort overseen by the Montenegrin Helsinki Committee. Under the Helsinki Committee's auspices, NDI's Resident Representative, together with a CeSID representative, monitored the second round of the presidential elections, which resulted in a victory for Milo Djukanovic.

Through his meetings with political party representatives, NGOs and the media, and by participating in election monitoring efforts, NDI's Resident Representative determined that NDI could positively affect Montenegro's democratic transition process. Accordingly, as mentioned above, NDI conducted an assessment mission in November 1998, meeting with political parties, nongovernmental organizations and the media. On the matter of election-related assistance, NDI's delegation proposed an expert review of the draft election law and, in December, based on the parties' receptivity to this idea, NDI formed a Montenegro Election Law Advisory Group to review the Draft Law on the Election of Councilmen and Deputies. NDI assembled five election law experts to provide commentary on the republic's draft election legislation for parliament and local government. In February 1998, NDI provided its commentary to political parties, the government and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Montenegro's new election law was passed in February 1998.

CeSID and the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CeDEM), a leading Montenegrin civic organization, coordinated a joint monitoring effort for the 1998 parliamentary elections. CeSID staff trained observers recruited by CeDEM on observer rights, responsibilities and duties, and were themselves monitors. Both organizations received credentials from the Montenegrin central election commission. This marked the first occasion in which CeSID was officially credentialed to monitor an election on Yugoslav territory. Forty-six monitors observed voting procedures and vote counting activities at 247 polling stations, about 25 percent of all polling stations.

The two organizations released a joint statement following the elections in which they reported that the polls were "free and fair." In their joint statement, CeSID and CeDEM complimented efforts by election officials to amend voters lists, but found fault with state-owned media bias in favor of President Djukanovic's For a Better Life coalition.

V. PROGRAM RESULTS

Political Party Building -- Serbia

NDI technical assistance program accomplished a notable first in democratic development in Serbia: with NDI training party leaders and activists began to plan strategically and continuously about internal organization and external outreach in nonelection periods. Parties also developed means to identify and address voter concerns:

- C In Kragujevac, GSS drafted and distributed a voter questionnaire;**
- C In Kragujevac, DS established priorities such as increasing membership by one percent and improving financial resources. Based on NDI training, the branch drafted, distributed and collected more than 900 voter surveys on local issues. Of 67 municipal constituencies, the branch compiled demographic profiles of 33, which helped it to target information to voters;**
- C GSS established a strategic planning group and survey group to expand its use of survey canvassing; and**
- C In Vracar, DS party activists circulated over one hundred surveys of voter attitudes on local issues.**

Political Party Building -- Montenegro

NDI's pre-election training introduced parties to concepts that they would implement prior to the elections. For example, the Democratic Union of Albanians announced plans to conduct strategic meetings with party branches and share the information presented by NDI. NDI's training also helped parties identify factors that will be important to electoral success. As a result of its session with NDI, the Djukanovic wing of the Democratic Party of Socialists identified factors that would be key to its success in the May elections, including the targeting of undecided voters, door-to-door canvassing, and developing a written election strategy and plan.

Election Processes -- Serbia

Through their cooperation, NDI and CeSID trained approximately 1,000 volunteers in nonpartisan election monitoring, although the government's refusal to accredit monitors diminished the number of participants. CeSID's train-the-trainers approach reached 50 activists who trained others in election monitoring.

Through NDI's election monitoring program, CeSID has established a group of approximately 1,000 trained volunteers. CeSID's public relations campaign, seminars and public meetings have established the Center as a credible source of electoral information and a public watchdog. Through its reports, *Eyes on the Elections* and *Eyes on the Elections 2*, CeSID has comprehensively assessed the deficient Serbian electoral process, bringing it to the attention of the international community, and informing Serbs of their right to participate in their electoral process.

Due mainly to its timely election work, CeSID grew in eight months to become a leading, nonpartisan voice for democratic reform in Serbia.

Election Processes -- Montenegro

NDI assembly of election law experts who provided commentary on Montenegro's draft election legislation for parliament and local government exhibited the Institute's ability to respond to the needs of Montenegro's nascent democratic development. The commentary process also afforded NDI the opportunity to establish links with the Montenegrin government and political community. These relationships will provide the basis for future cooperation on NDI's political party program.

CeSID furthered its reputation in Yugoslavia as a leading election watchdog organization after monitoring Montenegro's parliamentary election. The organization provided a Yugoslav component to the monitoring process, thereby preventing election observation from being the exclusive domain of foreign organizations.

VI. EVALUATION

In spite of Serbia's increasing isolation and the government's less than favorable disposition toward genuine democratization, NDI was able to pursue its program in line with objectives laid out in its proposal. The presence in Serbia of NDI's resident representative was tenuous due to the government's reluctance to issue a long-term visa, which would have lent stability and greater consistency to NDI's program. Overall, NDI was able to make the transfer from the political level, e.g., an assessment of the political situation and political actors, to the programmatic level, i.e., delivering concrete training in response to assistance needs articulated by participating parties.

CeSID's training provided its volunteers with the skills necessary to participate in the Serbian political process as impartial, informed monitors, and introduced the concept of domestic monitoring to Serbian political life and the average individual's political consciousness. While CeSID's accomplishments may appear modest, the Center has introduced the idea that Serbs and Montenegrins can assume responsibility for their political process--an important first step toward a genuine democratic transition. CeSID's unsuccessful attempt to monitor inside polling stations was noted in the OSCE statement on the elections, which criticized the Serbian government for not offering credentials to nonpartisan domestic monitors.

NDI's visits to Montenegro and NDI's subsequent program assessment mission accomplished three objectives. First, NDI acquired a better understanding of the republic's political situation. Second, NDI established relationships with political parties, government officials, NGOs and the media. Finally, the meetings provided NDI with an understanding of the political parties' training needs. This information was essential as NDI designed training conducted in early 1998 in preparation for the spring's extraordinary parliamentary elections.

Montenegro's political situation and government create a favorable environment for long-term democratization work.